



DECISION MAKING AND ADJUSTMENT BEHAVIOUR OF VISUALLY CHALLENGED ADOLESCENTS: CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Successful decision making in a social setting depends on the ability to understand the intentions, emotions and beliefs of others. Children live and grow in the social world. Individuals think to satisfy their curiosity and much of their social thought is practical, to attain their goal. Children's thought about their social world influences how they behave towards it. The main purpose of this paper is to review the influence of decision making on adjustment behaviour of visually challenged adolescents. The sample was purposively selected to study the cases of two of the visually challenged adolescents from Special School, in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India. The investigator with the help of Supervisor appraised the observed behaviour of adjustment in these children. It may be concluded that the social cognitive ability of decision making is at least, to certain extent influences adjustment behaviour of visually challenged adolescents. It is solely based on the case study carried out by the investigator.

KEY WORDS: Adjustment behaviour, Adolescents, Decision making, Social cognition,

Introduction

The way humans behave can, at least partly, be explained by their basic thought patterns, which are the core of social cognitions. It is the ability of how individuals form inferences from the social information in the environment. Research on social cognition explores on how one make social judgments about other individuals or social groups, about social roles, and about their own experiences in social settings. Making social judgment is more difficult than one might imagine. The information available to a person is often, incomplete, ambiguous, or downright contradictory. One might assume that social cognition involves seeing the world accurately and forming unbiased, clear assessments of the social life that swirls around.

Revealing from Earlier Studies

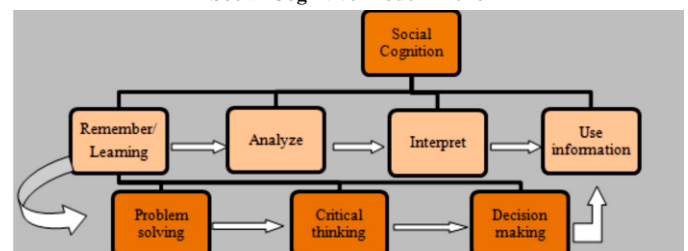
Feride (2016) revealed in his studies that adolescent girls reported greater difficulty in general in decisiveness, and dysfunctional belief difficulties than adolescent boys. Ishita, Linda and Sarah (2016) opined that peer decision making was a promising intervention for students with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum disorders. It helped them develop a better understanding of positive and negative peer relationships and learn systematic decision making skills for improved handling of social situations in the school and community. It added credence to using systematic, strategy-based decision making interventions designed to address the cognitive and motivational peer pressure. Sebastian, Azzura and Thorsten (2016) found that the use of simple heuristics does not progress uni-directionally across development, but strongly depend on the task environment, in line with the perspective of ecological rationality. Yup (2014) determined that the occupational decision making processes of gifted adolescents incorporate a predictive role for cultural orientation and an intermediary role for motivation-related values in the formation of attitudes towards occupations. Fulya, and Oguzhan (2013) inferred that problem solving and self-esteem in decision making significantly predict subjective well-being and vigilance style was a significant predictor of subjective well-being. (Hayes and Allinson, 1994; Beach, 1990); revealed that an understanding of one's cognitive styles and that of others helps in fostering better relationships, improving conflict handling, enhancing communication and decision making and individuals change from one decision to another during the pre-decision phase. From these studies it is inferred that decision making skill of adolescents is a necessary factor in social cognitive development.

Social Cognitive approach

Both social information processing and social-cognitive learning theories assume that social cognitions develop through interaction with the environment (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge & Pettit, 2003). Social cognition is flexible and its processes are well equipped to adapt to different circumstances. It is the process of how one think about their social events and people they encounter. It refers to the manner in which children remember, interpret, analyze and use information about the social settings (Mathew & Raja, 2015a). It involves the cognitive abilities of decision making, problem solving, reasoning, creative, intuitive, critical, and logical thinking (Dewey, 1993; Lewis & Smith, 1993; Crawl, et al., in Santrock, 2012). Individuals do not facsimile every social event they encounter, they determine which course of action to take through self-reflection. Inner thoughts are key aspects of learning and socializing and it is what makes individuals human. The social cognitive model represents how individuals process

information in social settings.

Social Cognitive Model – 2016



* Authors: (Mathew & Raja's Social Cognitive model- 2016)

The information children gather from the environment induces learning and it is symbolic in nature. It is initiated by a problem or task that the child faces, involves some trial and error which entails analyzing the task critically and arriving at a decision and ultimately leading to a solution of the problem (Warren in Rao, 2008). The child is then, able to interpret the task and use the information in actual learning situations.

Decision making

Decision making is one of the most important functions of human cognitive abilities. Decision making is the process of choosing a course of action among two or more alternatives in the midst of pursuing one's goals. Every decision making process produces a final choice that may or may not prompt action. It is one of the central activities of one achievement or success. Good decision making is an essential skill to become an effective and successful individual and every decision has its impact on individuals.

Decisions vary widely in importance for the decision maker. Many decisions in life are unimportant and may need little thought. Other decisions are more important, and evoke active reasoning aimed at acquiring a satisfactory representation of alternatives of options. Decision may also be important when it relates to a significant opinion or emotional value (Larrick, 1993). It is considered as a motivational factor that affects the cognitive effort that individuals expend on a problem, and the strategies that are used to make a decision. Decision making is a process made up of four continuous interrelated phases; explorative (searching), speculative (analysis), evaluative (weighing) and selective (commitment).

Explorative: The decision-maker ought to find occasions for making a decision. One must make a realistic appraisal of one's views and what are the current problems. **Speculative:** The decision-maker needs to analyze various factors affecting a decision problem, so that an appropriate response can be obtained. One has to take advantage of the challenging opportunities in the environment and know how to utilize the resources, to get the maximum possible benefits for the individual - indicates analyzing. **Evaluative:** The decision-maker is expected to make a cost benefit analysis of various alternatives. Like the pros and cons of a particular event, indicates evaluating. **Selective:** It is a question of making a choice among alternatives that would maximize the decision-makers total expected rela-

tive value. It is the process by which the decision maker tries to jump over the obstacles placed between one's position and the desired future position (Hayes & Allinson, 1996). Decision making is a process of choosing the best among the available alternatives.

Decision making and Visually Challenged Adolescents

Adolescence is a time of increased decision making about the future, which friends to choose, which course to select and so on. Adolescents appear to be more competent decision makers than early adolescents, who in turn are more competent than children (Sylvester, 2007). Adolescents who are visually challenged are differently abled than their sighted peers. Each individual's developmental profile and learning is uniquely determined by a complex interplay of factors that visually challenged influences include: individual differences in decision making ability, problem solving ability, thinking styles, learning style, persistence and motivation, sensitivity to a range of cue and information sources in social learning environments (Webster & Roe, 1998).

Adjustment behaviour of Visually Challenged

Visually challenged children undergoes an emotional status, demanding that the ways in which the person perceives, behaves, thinks, and feels about the world. The process of adjustment must be a protracted one, and it may take a number of ways depending upon the child's temperament, previous experiences and their ways of coping with situations (Dodds, 1991).

Hull (1990) outlines in his autobiography four distinct stages in his own adjustment to sight loss. First was a period of hope, the next phase consisted of what appeared to be quite positive behaviour. It was the search for alternative techniques, but it was replaced by a period of despair, characterized by sleeplessness and depression. The final stage was an emergence from despair into a realization that there was much inner strength, although the process of adjustment was by no means yet over.

Case Studies: Decision making and Adjustment Behaviour

Two case studies are given below by the investigator while her interaction with visually challenged adolescents, school and teachers to illustrate the range of individual differences encountered and the complex interplay of factors that influence decision making and adjustment behaviour in their social setting.

Case 1: An 18 years old girl 'X' of Standard XII, (name omitted intentionally for research ethics) is visually challenged. She comes from a poor economic background having meager income of her mother. The father of 'X' left her mother and two brothers, when she was seven years old. Her both brothers are sighted and undergoing schooling in a nearby village school. X was born Blind and therefore she was not allowed to attend school. When the teachers of the Special school visited the village found her not attending school. The teacher advised the parent to send the girl to school, but the mother showed disinterest in educating her daughter who is visually challenged. But 'X' had a great desire for education. She insisted her mother to send her to school. With her compulsion the mother admitted her to the School for Blind, in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India. At the age of 7 she was admitted to school. Though she was ambitious, displayed adjustment problems and often acted impulsive. She was unable to cope with the new environment, teachers and friends. She often withdrew from peer group and remained a loner. But with the constant mentoring of a teacher whom she liked, 'X' was able to make improvements. The teacher identified in her the talent of music and encouraged her to play instrument of harmonium and sing in school choir. 'X' was able to appreciate her and accept her inability. It helped her to overcome the aggressive and impulsive nature. Now she leads the school choir and performs well in academic field. Continuous practice of music enhances her learning and she reports, 'I can memorize learning materials easily, because of music and I am able to control my impulsive nature owing to continuous listening to music'. She aims to become a music teacher in future. "Music is a discipline and misters of good manners, she make the people milder and gentler, more moral and more reasonable" – Martin Luther King

Case 2: Anne (name changed) is a 14 years old girl studying in standard IX in a Government Aided School for blind in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. She was born with vision and studied in normal school until the age of 12. Due to retinal problems at the age of 12, she lost her vision completely. The girl could not accept the fact that she could no more have the sight. Her parents tried their best to convince her, but in vain. She became emotionally disturbed and hated her parents, siblings and friends. Adults could not approach her and she would not adjust to the new situation, and became a problem child for parents. It was a turning point in her life when parents brought her to the School for Blind. Those in the campus who are of her age group were visually challenged and made her feel comfortable and it was her friends who motivated her and instilled self-confidence, acceptance and the need for independence. The girl now learned Braille and uses a Scribe for examination and performs extremely well academically and is able to move along with friends. Peer support is vital in an individual's life (Santrock, 2006).

The above cases indicated the complex and unpredictable nature of children's individual needs, as the clinical aspects of visual impairments interact with psychological, social and family environment. Though, children who are visually challenged have learning difficulties, adjustment problems, peer group prob-

lems, emotional and social problems, they are able to outlive in life independently with the help of education. Teachers play the key role in forming these children (Mathew & Raja, 2016c). The above findings are purely on the observation of the investigator.

Educational Implications

From the case studies it is evident that teachers have the pivotal role in enhancing their cognitive and non-cognitive abilities. They assist adolescents to make wise decisions. To make sound decisions in personal, and group, the teacher should motivate and guide the adolescents in making the right choices. In order to be effective in social environment, the teacher need to be a good listener, well-ordered sense of priorities, develop self confidence, monitor students' progress regularly, help them to remain resilient with feedbacks, develop high tolerance for ambiguity, guide them to practice to make practical decisions. Most children have a need to discover more about objects and events in the environment, to pass on material wants and to express feelings. Piaget's research on problem solving has generated some important notions about children's active involvement in making hypotheses about the world, their own capacity to reflect on experiences, and to formulate their own ideas about how things work (Warren, 1994). Scaffolding of the cognitive abilities among adolescents leads to mature thinking and decisions. Involving children in physical activities and outdoor pursuits requires some resourcefulness and confidence on the part of teachers. Social development is distinguished from adjustment. The former is concerned with progress in acquiring the behaviours that permits an appropriate social relationships and entry into culture and the latter is how well the individual adapts to the demands of social environments (Dodds, 1993).

Conclusion

Adolescence differs from adults in the way they behave, solve problems, and make decisions. It is plausible to consider that having the will and skill to decide in a certain way will tend to go hand-in-hand. Learning progresses most effectively if social cognitive abilities are nurtured and natured. Hence, it can have an impact on the adjustment behaviour of adolescents in their social settings.

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